



Request for Proposals

Downtown Dowagiac, Pennsylvania Street Housing Development Opportunity



Contact:

Dowagiac City Manager's Office
241 S. Front Street, Dowagiac, MI 49047

Amanda Sleigh, Assistant City Manager, ACM@dowagiac.org
Matt Money, Economic Development Liaison, mmoney@dowagiac.org

Introduction

The City of Dowagiac is soliciting qualified developers to plan, construct, and manage a high-quality villa or condominium housing development on a 2.90-acre city-owned site at Pennsylvania and Main Street in downtown Dowagiac..

The objective of this RFP is to determine the level of interest and a number of qualified available candidates for a unique residential-use concept that fits into the downtown and adjacent residential neighborhoods. The city will review qualification packages to select an experienced and qualified developer who presents a plan that best aligns with the city’s needs.

The City of Dowagiac is a forward-thinking community located in Cass County, Michigan, with a population of approximately 5,800 residents. Positioned near Elkhart, Mishawaka, and South Bend, Indiana, as well as St. Joseph, Benton Harbor, and Kalamazoo, Michigan, Dowagiac offers convenient regional access while maintaining its small-town character.

The City has recently updated its Master Plan and Parks and Open Space Plan and launched a citywide housing initiative to support long-term growth. Central to this effort is the South Front Street development, Dowagiac’s next major redevelopment corridor, designed to connect the downtown business district to a new residential neighborhood anchored by Lions Park, water access, and enhanced streetscape improvements.

The Pennsylvania site serves as a critical link in this vision, offering a rare opportunity for a developer to lead the first new residential project that ties these districts together and helps shape the future of downtown living in Dowagiac.

Depending on the number and quality of responses received, the city reserves the right to request additional information from some or all respondents or to issue additional requests to advance the review process. This process does not obligate the City of Dowagiac to select or to negotiate with a development team or to accept offers which the City Council, in its sole judgement, determines not to be in the best interest of the city and its residents.

Thank you for your interest in this unique development opportunity.

History of Dowagiac

Dowagiac, Michigan was founded in 1848 when the Michigan Central Railroad established a line through Cass County, attracting early land speculators and laying the foundation for future growth. After modest early development, Philo D. Beckwith established the Round Oak Stove Company in 1871, producing efficient, well-designed heating stoves that were accessible to households across the country. This innovation ushered in Dowagiac's industrial era and established a manufacturing base that would define the community for more than a century.

By the late 1800s, Round Oak had become one of the largest stove manufacturers in the nation, continuing operations through World War II alongside several other furnace companies that earned Dowagiac the nickname "Furnace City" from the 1920s through the 1950s. The city's industrial strength was further reinforced by companies such as James Heddon's Sons Company, once the largest manufacturer of fishing tackle in the world. With strong rail access and highway connectivity, Dowagiac thrived as a regional manufacturing hub throughout the post-war era.

Like many Midwestern communities, Dowagiac experienced the decline of large-scale manufacturing beginning in the 1960s, with further contraction in the 1990s. However, the establishment of Southwestern Michigan College in 1964 helped stabilize the local economy and guide the community through transition.

Dowagiac has evolved into a vibrant, livable community that blends its historic character with modern amenities. Ideally located within commuting distance of major employment centers in Southwest Michigan and Northern Indiana, the city offers residents a high quality of life with a walkable downtown, local dining and shopping, year-round festivals, and access to parks and nearby lakes and waterways. Residents also benefit from proximity to Beacon Health System's Dowagiac Hospital, providing state-of-the-art healthcare close to home.

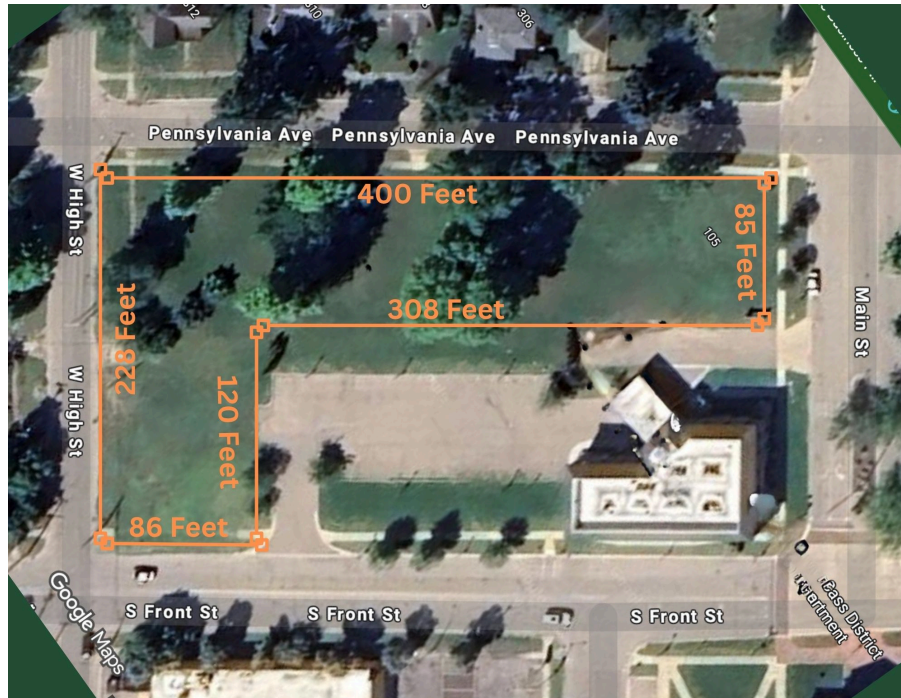
Dowagiac is also proud to serve as a hub for surrounding lake communities, with residents from nearby lakes regularly coming into the heart of the city for dining, shopping, and everyday commerce—further strengthening the local economy and year-round activity.

The local economy is supported by a diverse mix of employers, including Alliance Cloud Services, Lyons Industries, Creative Foam, Southwestern Michigan College, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, Four Winds Casino, and Mennel Milling—positioning Dowagiac as a well-balanced community with both opportunity and lifestyle appeal.



Overview of Development Opportunity

A. Site Description



The site is [located](#) within the interior of the downtown block bordered by Main, Pennsylvania, and W. High Streets. This unique development opportunity is envisioned as a walkable extension of downtown, offering residents the ability to live within and fully experience the energy of Dowagiac's core.

Located within the O-S Office Service District and supported by a flexible housing overlay, the site is well-suited for a thoughtfully designed housing such as condominium, villa, and townhome-style residences. These housing types—potentially including shared-wall configurations—allow for efficient land use, maximized density, and reduced maintenance for owners, while supporting modern amenities and an active, low-maintenance lifestyle.

Open to no maximum lot coverage, zero setback requirements, providing an opportunity to create a cohesive, high-quality residential development that complements the surrounding downtown environment.

B. Development Objectives

With this new development, the city hopes to have an increased, diverse population living downtown, an influx of high visibility new housing options, and a greater tax base. Downtown Dowagiac is the heartbeat of the local community and home to many specialized retail shops and restaurants. A current housing market study for Dowagiac indicates that a massive need exists for more residential opportunities.

In 2024, the city commissioned an independent retail marketing study for the Dowagiac service area. The results of that study can be found [here](#).

C. City Development Team and Incentives

Dowagiac's development team brings deep experience, a solutions-oriented approach, and the ability to move projects forward with efficiency and confidence. Developers working in Dowagiac benefit from a community that is progressive, responsive, and committed to seeing projects through to completion.

The City Council, Planning Commission, and city staff have refined their processes to create a streamlined, predictable, and highly positive development experience. Collaboration and clear communication are at the core of how we work with partners.

Our team collaborates with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, and federal partners such as the USDA and EDA to secure grants, financing, and other resources that support successful projects. We also have proven experience leveraging Brownfield TIF and a range of additional incentive tools to help bring developments to life.

Desired Developer Qualifications

The City envisions this site as a high-quality residential development that enhances the surrounding area. While the City reserves the right to consider developers with varying or nontraditional experience, preference will be given to those demonstrating a strong combination of the following qualifications:

- Proven experience in the development, management, and/or ownership of multi-story residential properties in a downtown setting, preferably within Michigan.
- Experience collaborating with municipal governments through business development, community initiatives, or other public-private partnerships.
- Demonstrated expertise in the design and construction of distinctive, high-quality residential spaces.
- A clear and compelling development concept that aligns with the City's vision for the site.

Submission Format and Contents

Submissions must address the following sections in order to be considered complete:

Section 1- Team & Experience

RFP responses should include a cover letter providing an introduction of their relevant team members including similar past projects and resumes.

Section 2-Proposed Redevelopment Business Plan

Responses should describe the overall vision and recommended strategy to bring the developer's concept to fruition. This section should include a preliminary business plan, scope, buildout, timeline and any other relevant details regarding the development project.

Section 3-Conceptual Financial Structure/Financial Stability

Provide a conceptual financial structure, including private sources of funding and proposed structure for providing compensation for the city-owned real estate (property purchase, ground lease, etc.). The city has significant flexibility with respect to disposition options and methods for compensation and as a result encourages and welcomes financial proposals which maximize the value of the development and its positive economic and community impacts to Dowagiac's downtown.

Provide evidence of the financial capability to undertake the project if asked. Suitable documentation includes audited or reviewed financial statements, bank or financial institution commitments, tax statements or other verifiable information demonstrating the financial stability necessary to support a project of this scope.

Evaluation Criteria

Given the desired correlation between the adjacent neighborhood of the anticipated development, developer qualifications and experience will be assigned the greatest value including but not limited to the following:

- Developer qualifications and experience.
 - Conceptual financial structure and ability to carry out projects.
 - Ability to add tax base and complement other downtown apartments.
- Honoring Dowagiac's historic downtown aesthetic and future vision in proposed redevelopment vision.
- Purchase price.
- Provided financial assurances that the project will be constructed per the development agreement.

Inquiries

Inquiries regarding this RFP, including site walk-throughs, must be submitted in writing via email. All such written inquiries must be received by 5:00 p.m. on July 1, 2026. Please send inquiries to:

Matt Money
Economic Development Liaison
City of Dowagiac, Michigan
Email: mmoney@dowagiac.org

Response Deadline

Responses to this RFP must be submitted by no later than 5:00 p.m. on July 15, 2026. Responses received after this date and time will not be considered.

Final submission to be emailed in PDF format to:

Matt Money
Economic Development Liaison
City of Dowagiac, Michigan
Email: mmoney@dowagiac.org

Flexible Housing Overlay

Sections:

Purpose.

Applicability.

Designated areas.

Property development standards.

Open space designation and preservation.

Purpose.

The intent of the flexible housing overlay is to accommodate urban densities of the underlying zoning district while allowing residential development to utilize less land area. These provisions aim to allow greater flexibility in the design of neighborhoods to ensure development is in harmony with the natural characteristics on site and to preserve features such as critical areas, open space, recreation areas, or scenic vistas.

Applicability.

A flexible housing overlay may be applied to various neighborhoods in all residential zones as permitted in this title.

Designated areas.

Unless specifically addressed in this section, flexible housing developments shall adhere to the underlying provisions of the zoning district in which they are located.

Property development standards.

- (1) Minimum area required for a flexible housing overlay is not less than one acre.
- (2) Density. Up to 24 dwelling units per acre allowed, with shared wall space between 2 or more whole units.
- (3) No maximum lot coverage with approved site plan.
- (4) Community centers provided for the enjoyment of the residents and management of the development are permitted.
- (5) Parking. The standard parking requirements may be modified as follows:
 - (a) Parking may be applied to the entire site rather than to each individual lot;

(b) Parking areas shall be placed in easily accessible locations;

(c) Designated parking spaces should be clearly marked.

(6) Housing Type. Attached and detached single-family and multi-family homes and townhomes are allowed as residential structures.

Open space designation and preservation.

(1) Each flexible housing development shall provide not less than 10 percent of the gross site area for common open space which shall be primarily concentrated in large areas. When these areas are designated as critical areas they should be designed to provide connectivity for habitat functions.

(2) Parking areas, rights-of-way, driveways, and yards within individual lots can be included in common open space.

(3) Facilities and other improvements that enhance recreational use(s) may be located in an open space area. Such facilities can include, but are not limited to, trails, fields, picnic areas, playgrounds, and athletic courts.

(4) Open Space Plan. For all designated open space areas the proposal shall include an open space plan. All open space areas excluding critical areas shall comply with the following:

(a) Identify all proposed improvements such as public facilities, proposed vegetation, and existing vegetation to remain; and

(b) The plan shall outline maintenance responsibilities in a format acceptable to the administrator; and

(c) Open space plans may change over time to allow new amenities and uses as needs change