



To: Northville DDA EDC Committee

From: Kate Knight, DDA Executive Director

Subject: Consideration to Discuss and Recommend Potential Ordinance Amendment for Street-Level Use Regulations in the Central Business District

Date: September 19, 2025

Background: It is a priority for Northville's downtown to maintain and encourage a vibrant, walkable business district, to support local businesses and economic growth. Municipalities may regulate the first-floor business use in downtown areas to cultivate a vibrant, walkable street life that draws pedestrians and supports the local economy. Ground-floor regulations are a core component of zoning laws, influencing everything from the character of a neighborhood to property values.

A key reason for regulating business use is to foster an active and engaging pedestrian experience. First-floor business regulations help create lively, interesting streets that make people want to walk around and linger. Encouraging active uses through zoning often promotes "activating" uses like retail shops, restaurants, and salons on the ground floor. In contrast, non-activating uses like windowless offices can dull the streetscape and discourage foot traffic. Examples include empty dark conference rooms, waiting rooms screened for privacy, and systems furniture/cubicles for offices in first floor storefronts.

Regulations for first floor use aim to maximize the economic potential of a downtown business district by attracting customers and encouraging complementary businesses to cluster. Ground-floor locations offer high visibility and are essential for attracting walk-in customers, which is a major advantage for retailers and restaurants.

Analysis: The DDA and City have no guidelines in place to encourage property owners to seek tenants with business uses that contribute to stronger destination pedestrian traffic and promotes "activating" uses like retail shops, restaurants, and salons on the ground floor.

Budget Impact: None

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Northville DDA staff and Community Development staff continue discussion and due diligence toward development of a potential ordinance amendment for Street-Level Use Regulations in the Central Business District.

Motion: Move to authorize DDA Director to work with Community Development Director to continue discussion and due diligence toward development of a potential ordinance amendment for Street-Level Use Regulations in the Central Business District.



September 16, 2025

Kate Knight, Executive Director
Northville Downtown Development Authority
215 West Main Street
Northville, MI 48167

Re: Street-Level Use Regulations in the Central Business District

Dear Director Knight,

The City is exploring potential zoning changes to better support active street-level uses along Main Street and North Center Street. At this stage, this is strictly a preliminary concept, and no formal ordinance amendment has been prepared.

Specifically, the concept under consideration would apply to properties fronting Main Street between Hutton Street and Wing Street, excluding Northville Square, as well as properties fronting North Center Street between Main Street and Dunlap Street. Under this approach, street-level occupancy would be limited to retail and businesses that typically generate customer visits and pedestrian activity. Office and similar uses that do not usually draw walk-in traffic would continue to be permitted elsewhere in the CBD, including on upper floors of the same buildings, but not at the street level along these key corridors.

The intent is to encourage storefronts that contribute to a lively and welcoming pedestrian environment throughout the day and into the evening. By fostering businesses that remain open beyond traditional office hours, we can reduce the number of inactive or “dark” storefronts during evenings and weekends and better align with the DDA’s goal of creating a vibrant downtown.

Before moving forward with any draft ordinance language, staff would like to gather input from the DDA Board on this concept. The Board’s perspective is critical to understanding potential implications for business recruitment, economic development, and the overall downtown experience. If desired, this item can be placed on a future DDA Board agenda.

Thank you for facilitating this discussion with the Board.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justin Quagliata".

Justin Quagliata, AICP
Community Development Director