

Master plan for downtown Clawson recognized on national level, receives APA award

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Downtown Clawson

For a brief moment on Sunday, May 7, the City of Clawson was at the center of attention in New York City.

Detroit-based consulting firm Giffels Webster worked with the city to develop the Clawson Downtown Master Plan, which was adopted in 2015. That plan was awarded the 2017 Vernon Deines Honor Award for an Outstanding Small Town Special Project Plan by the American Planning Association (APA) at its annual National Planning Conference.

Jill Bahm, City Planning, Zoning, and Economic Development Consultant for Giffels Webster, says the national recognition received for Clawson's downtown master plan is a result of the community, including city leaders, business owners, and residents, working closely together to help Giffels Webster identify just what it is that makes Clawson special.

While downtown Clawson has destinations that draw in visitors from out of town, it also has businesses that serve the local community. The aim of the master plan is to enhance that balance by filling in the gaps and improving what's already there.

The old downtown master plan was outdated, says Bahm, and tried too hard to make Clawson the next Birmingham or Royal Oak. That's not what Clawson stakeholders say they want to be, and the new master plan aims to enhance Clawson's downtown, rather than transform it into something that it's not.



Before and after in Downtown Clawson, Render courtesy Giffels-Webster.

Business and property owners are making individual improvements to their own properties. There's an emphasis on improving public spaces, including the plazas and passageways that can encourage pedestrian traffic. Simple things like better lighting and public seating can get people circulating through downtown city sidewalks and patronizing businesses.

Enhancing Clawson, and not changing its character, has been the goal from the start. The award is a recognition of that approach.

"I think it helps reinforce, for the city, DDA, business owners, and residents, that their vision is appreciated and that they're on the right track toward what's right for them," says Bahm.

"It validates what they're doing as a community."

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