

# Making Great Places: East Jordan Downtown

By John Iacoangeli and Michelle Bennett

EAST JORDAN  
pop. 2,239



## Master Planning at a Crossroads

At the time of writing its Master Plan, East Jordan was at a crossroads. Redevelopment opportunities were abundant but in need of harnessing their potential into a collective vision. Nestled at the south arm of Lake Charlevoix at the confluence of the Jordan River, East Jordan is optimally located to serve as a hub of recreation-based tourism with a bustling year-round economy. And while much of the redevelopment attention was rightfully focused on the lakefront, the city understood that the downtown also had to be a compelling anchor to become such a destination.

## Public Outreach

The city realized that the transformational change they are looking for requires regional coordination and cooperation between the public and private sector. To chart this path, East Jordan chose a collaborative process for the community engagement portion of the Master Plan and as a result won the 2021 MAP Award for Public Outreach. East Jordan invested in a heavily tactile engagement series to inspire its residents to learn by doing. A two-day design charrette allowed residents to work with aerial images of potential redevelopment sites and with blocks, markers, and transparent trace paper to build a reimagined site. After professionals, typically a part of the development process (DDA, the EJ Company, East Jordan Community Foundation, City Commissioners, and Chamber of Commerce), refined the community's suggestions, participants were rewarded with a set of renderings

that reflected their hard work and input. In this way, East Jordan was able to avoid a commonly frustrating part of engagement: well-intentioned exercises that do not produce a tangible resolution for residents to champion afterwards. The charrette process culminated with renderings for three sites that contained a physical vision for each site, a packaged land use framework to market to investors, and a Future Land Use Map to support the proposed changes.

## Downtown Sites Reimagined

A city-owned site, 116 Main Street, was selected for the charrette process. A compact site of only 0.37 acres, its orientation, downtown location near the lake, and historic architecture pushed it to priority status. Formerly a community center, the building was re-visioned to become a mixed-used building (commercial on the ground floor and residential on the upper stories). The proposed development maintains and enhances the existing physical setbacks of the existing community center building. This enhances pedestrian activity and can create opportunities for pedestrians to linger, whether it is to shop, dine, or interact with other pedestrians. The recessed setback of the proposed development leads to an open atrium that physically splits the development. The open atrium presents the opportunity for additional commercial frontage and access to upper-level residential units. Furthermore, the open atrium would allow pedestrian circulation from the post office to the east, to Main Street, at which point there are established mid-block pedestrian routes to the marina and waterfront.





As a seasonal city with fluctuating population and a strong service industry (nearly one-quarter of the city's workforce is in retail or art, entertainment, recreation, or accommodations), different housing types are in demand. In fact, the residential Target Market Analysis by Land Use USA estimates that the annual market potential for large and small multiplex housing units in Charlevoix County far exceeds what is supplied in East Jordan. This gap suggests that East Jordan can absorb some of the regional demand for denser housing options, and correspondingly concentrate units near goods, jobs, and services. Similarly, retail analysis and community survey results indicated that certain retail types were underrepresented and had the potential to thrive in East Jordan. This site could help pair the two.

The former municipal boat launch at 98 Bridge Street was also selected as a redevelopment site. The community envisioned that the 1.7-acre site, with its waterfront access downtown, could accommodate a mix of retail, dining, and housing. The proposed development for the boat launch site seeks to maintain the valuable park setting at waters' edge of Lake Charlevoix. To achieve this, the eastern portion of the site will be developed as a public park space in the plan, featuring decks and piers for water and fishing access, a lakeside picnic shelter, and a portion of nonmotorized pedestrian trail linking the space to the proposed boardwalk spanning the Jordan River.

The west portion of the site will be developed to establish commercial and residential opportunities. This development would include single-story commercial featuring upper-level space, which could possibly accommodate uses such as rooftop dining. The two-story developments in the center of the site represent additional first-floor commercial retail opportunities, while the second floor and rooftops would serve as residential space. Because of their orientation and proximity to the lake, residential spaces would provide valuable view of Lake Charlevoix and downtown East Jordan, and proximity to the adjacent proposed park space.



### What's Happening Now?

The city continues to move forward achieving this vision. East Jordan is currently developing an RFQ for this Community Center site that includes the community's vision. With this work done at the forefront, East Jordan can target developers that are willing to fit into the city's established framework for redevelopment. With community supported renderings, the city has elevated its chances for fulfilling the goals of expanding housing, repurposing a building, livening up downtown, and creating space for new business. 

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