



CONNECTING HOUGHTON

The City of Houghton embarked on a series of transformational projects, both small and large, to create spaces that connected people in its busy downtown to their waterfront by removing legacy barriers, embracing walkability and adding sense of place.

Population: 8,386
Annual Snow: 250+ inches
Home of Michigan Tech
Birthplace of Professional Hockey



To connect our downtown to our waterfront we needed to:

- change our historic emphasis on cars and parking that had created a dark, dirty barrier between our two biggest assets,
- replace aging infrastructure that was leading to skyrocketing legacy costs and
- create inviting and accessible spaces for people to gather and celebrate.

Put people ahead of cars



Build gathering space



Demolish an aging parking deck



Eliminate uninviting space



Clean ourselves up



Restore the view



First we started small and got creative



...most of the work was done by volunteers for the price of materials and little help from our DPW.

Then the heavy lifting started

2017

Lakeshore Drive Utilities

- Replaced water and sewer, looped system for reliability
- Made strategic connections when replacing sidewalks
- Partnered with utility companies on gas, electric, and fiber upgrades
- Built garden areas as part of surface restoration instead of asphalt
- Added street lighting to match waterfront trail

2021

Pier Placemaking Project

- Constructed waterfront pier as our town square
- Created waterfront trail route away from automobile traffic
- Replaced stormwater utilities
- Added sidewalks to lead to waterfront
- Created gardens bordering parking to help with stormwater management
- Added downtown trees
- Removable bollards for cruise ship docking
- Permanent tie-down points for festival tents
- Utility pedestals for transient docking

2023

Lakeshore Drive Corridor Rehabilitation

- Removed 1978 parking deck
- Constructed wider sidewalks now on both sides of street
- Built the Waterfront Walk to provide accessible route up/down
- Narrowed road to slow traffic
- Engineered rain gardens for stormwater infiltration
- Reorganized and optimized surface parking minimizing asphalt and maximize planting
- Added downtown trees
- Continued street lighting
- Created gathering spaces
- Added electronic information kiosks

These three projects leveraged over \$10M in MEDC and city funds

The Pier transformed the waterfront



The decaying deck used to separate the downtown



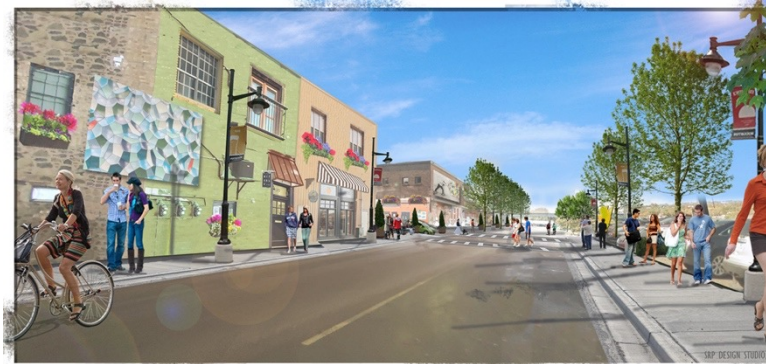
Reimagined spaces are now devoted to people and mobility

What we had for 45 years



Dark spaces for cars

Concept drawings



A vibrant, bright vision

Just after completion



A complete street



Uninviting, non-accessible stairs



Seeing the possible



Accessible for all abilities

Now we have places built for people to connect



A lot has been accomplished so far...



The entire process was incremental placemaking which started off with the low hanging fruit. By adding color, interesting things, and gardens we saw that the response justified the efforts.

We knew we'd never be able to make the all of changes overnight and started on a course to keep improving what we could on our own and then capitalize on opportunities to leverage outside funds for the larger projects.

The ideas kept coming and we worked them in.

Once we had repaired and replaced the utilities, we kept on placemaking and planning for the next phase.

The Pier was game changing for us downtown as it gave us that place we had in our plans for decades but could not seem to figure out how to make it happen.

Once it was finished we had that space and the waterfront was even more alive. With that added destination on the water we next had to address the aging parking deck before something catastrophic happened.



Removing the parking deck was not without controversy as it had been part of our downtown culture for more than 40 years, but we did not have a choice.

The need to take it down presented a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rethink the accessibility and flow of our downtown.

Many businesses now have an additional viable storefront; some buildings have turned their attention to the water; customers and the public have a safe, walkable, well-lit street; and we were able to create an accessible corridor for pedestrians to move between our main downtown street and the waterfront.

We look forward to what the future brings!

New decks now face a water view that many never knew existed.

Our Social District is up and operating.

People value the space we've created.

More than two blocks of our downtown are now open to the sunny sky and people are actually enjoy walking them.

We have a new sense of pride in our place.

With the major projects completed, our staff and resident volunteers can renew our efforts on making things incrementally better once again.



Connecting Houghton

We can't wait to see what's in store as new opportunities and investments seize on the asset we've created.

